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FUNCTIONS OF THE AREA CONSERVATIONIST¹

An area conservationist is in charge of the work of the Soil Conservation Service in a certain territory within a state. He is responsible for all phases of the work, technical as well as administrative. He works under the direction of the State Conservationist,² who is his supervisor.

The area conservationist is a line officer, and as such he functions in his area in the same manner as does a State Conservationist in a State, or a regional director in a region.

The primary function he performs is this:

He administers the planning, execution, and maintenance of a soil and water conservation program of high quality, minimum cost, and widespread application on land within his area, in full accordance with Service policies, regulations, and standards.

This statement is intended to include everything with which he is charged.

It includes the idea that the area conservationist must guide, help, assist, and counsel his people in whatever activity they engage upon, insofar as they need guidance and help, but particularly on the more difficult part of their work. More specific treatment of each of the many functions included or implied in this omnibus statement, follow:

1. SUPERVISION

He directs and supervises work unit conservationists, specialists in the area not assigned to a work unit, and clerical personnel assigned to his office.

1 This is a list of the functions (i.e., the kinds of work) that should be performed by an area conservationist, and that are present in all area conservationist's jobs. These functions should not in themselves, be considered a list of duties, since these must depend upon the particular conditions existing in each individual area. This is, in other words, a set of standard functions; but it is not a standard job description.

2 The term "State Conservationist" in this document includes the Territorial Conservationist in all cases.

The supervision of people requires the use of many skills, and it includes many phases of activity. For example, the area conservationist must see to it that the safety and health program or the information and educational program in his area is the best that can be devised - as an important part of his supervisory work. Likewise, he must provide for adequate training of all people requiring it. This he does either himself or by seeing to it that his work unit men do it, or by arranging for training to be done by appropriate Service officers of the State, region, or even Washington office.

The area conservationist has, of course, a considerable interest in the supervision of people who are not directly supervised by him. Thus, while he does not personally supervise an aid, ordinarily, or a work unit specialist, he is nevertheless responsible for seeing that these people are properly supervised.

2. OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

He manages or provides for the management of all operations within the area for maximum accomplishment and efficiency, making full use of all necessary devices to achieve these ends, including workload analyses, annual plans of operation, schedules, production control records, inspections, group action, work improvement studies, and the like.

This is the function often referred to as "production management" or preferably, "operations management." It is this aspect of an area conservationist's job that entitles him to be called a first-line operations manager, -- first-line, because he is nearest to the activities of the work units. It is particularly, although not entirely, in this kind of work that he is expected to call upon and use the assistance of the assistant State conservationist in charge of operations management for the State, (or the State Conservationist himself, if there is no assistant) and of the assistant regional director in charge of

operations management for the region. These two latter people - the operations managers for the State and Region - are in a position to guide and help the area conservationist to achieve the highest possible operating efficiency. They may work with him to perfect or improve operating methods, techniques, and procedures that are utilized to get work done. They are his consultants on this type of activity.

3. TECHNICAL WORK

He directs the use of technical standards and specifications necessary for work unit operation, including soil conservation survey legends, land capability tables, practice specifications, technical guides, conservation farming or ranching guides, basic conservation plans, and the like.

This function portrays the kind of work he does to ensure a program of "high quality." In a technical agency like the Service, this work is of great importance. The stepping-up of work output, or increasing of production, for which he strives in item 3, must never be construed to imply any lowering of technical quality. Very high production of substandard work is not desired in the Service at any time.

It is in this field of work primarily, that the area conservationist makes use of the assistance of technical specialists, both those in his area and those available from the regional office. He is expected to plan for such assistance and to arrange to utilize it expeditiously and effectively.

4. DISTRICT FORMATION

He directs Service work concerned with the formation or enlargement of soil conservation districts, in accordance with Service policies and State law or regulation.

Obviously, this function is applicable only to area conservationists whose areas are not completely covered by districts; and eventually, this

function is expected to cease entirely. Responsibility for Service leadership on this activity in his area rests on the area conservationist, as with all other phases of Service work. Even so, specific delegation of this function is not only feasible, but in many cases it may be desirable. In either case, close working relationships must be maintained with representatives of State and other agencies charged with carrying on this type of activity.

5. ASSEMBLING OF DATA

He directs the assembling of data required for conservation needs, for reports of progress and accomplishment, and for other periodic or special uses.

Some of this data will be used primarily by the area conservationists for purposes of management or control. Some data will be collected in order to make reports to the State Conservationist required by him for conduct of work in the State, or for State reports to the regional or Washington office.

Provision for adequate, well-kept records that may be used to supply report data, is, of course, an important part of this function.

6. RELATIONSHIPS

He provides leadership in developing and maintaining relationships essential to the conduct of the Service program in the area.

While each work unit conservationist, for example, will represent the Service with the district governing body or bodies of the district (s) he serves, the area conservationist will see to it that the representation is adequate and will help on the more difficult problems. There will be situations in which the area conservationist may need to develop and maintain certain relationships personally. There will be others--as with a watershed job affecting several work units--in which he must work very closely with his work

unit men, even assuming full leadership if necessary. The intent, however, is to relieve the area conservationist of relationships work, insofar as possible, except for direction and guidance of it, so that he may devote more time to other phases of work. Generally, in fact, the work unit conservationist is held responsible for the relationships with the representatives of other agencies in the work unit, as part of his regular work.

7. BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

He recommends action to the State Conservationist on personnel, budgets, procurement, property, and other things needed to conduct area business.

The area conservationist maintains no business office in the ordinary sense--no budgets, accounting records, extensive personnel records, or the like. Functions of this kind are performed by the state or regional offices. The area conservationist, nevertheless, is expected to make the best possible use of all resources available to him.

